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HISTORY OF
ELEPHANTA CAVES,
(GHARAPURI.)

Compiled by Captain W. T. DE BURGH,
Superintendent of the above Caves.

Bombay.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE view from the front of the Cave is one of exceeding beauty, commanding the fine bay between Elephanta, Trombay and the mainland. From the grey dawn of morning till the shades of night close down upon it, whether crowded with the white sails of hundreds of fishing craft, or only marked here and there by one or two passenger boats, and, perhaps, a small steamer; it is an ever fresh and varying scene of beauty. A few steps from the porch will lead the visitor to the site of an old bungalow, which commands the prospect to the south-west of Bombay and its splendid harbour. Butcher Island is in the foreground. Any true lover of Nature will feel himself amply rewarded for his trouble by the magnificent views to be here enjoyed.

Of the island of Elephanta itself it is about three miles in circumference, is beautifully wooded and interlaced with a very pretty creeper, which remains in bloom six or seven months in the year. There are many extremely pretty varieties of the beetle, and for collectors of butterflies no better place could be chosen, there being some beautiful specimens at all times of the year.

There is on the plateau, quite close to the Great Cave, the Superintendent's bungalow where refreshments of every kind can be obtained and served to visitors under the shed, where tables and chairs will be found for their convenience. Picnic parties should, however, give the Superintendent three or four days' notice, to enable him to supply their wants.

The Superintendent would recommend all visitors visiting the island in sailing boats to leave Bombay when the tide is rising, and so time their journey that they may leave Elephanta when the tide is going out. This arrangement will ensure them a saving of at least three-quarters of an hour each way. Very comfortable and safe boats can be obtained at any of the Bunders in Bombay at a fair charge. The Superintendent would recommend jolly boats as the best.

History of the Elephanta Caves.

THIS island is called Elephanta, or Gharapuri by the Hindus. It was first named Elephanta by the Portuguese from a large stone elephant, which stood near the old landing-place on the south side of the island. This elephant was thirteen feet in length and seven feet and four inches in height, but its head and neck dropped off in September, 1814, and subsequently the body sunk down into a shapeless mass of stone, which, in 1864, was removed to the Victoria Gardens in Bombay.

These caves are supposed to have been made in the sixth century A. C. by the Hindu raja, King Banasura, King of Kanara.

There are in all five caves, but seldom or ever are any visited but the Great Cave, which stands about 250 feet above the level of the sea. It faces the north and is entirely hewn out of a hard, compact species of trap rock.

From the front entrance to the back it measures about 130 feet and measures the same from east to west ; its height is about 17 feet. This temple has not

been regularly used as a place of worship for generations, still on occasions of Shiva festivals it is used, especially by Hindus of the Banian caste, and at the Shivaratri festival, just before the first new moon falling after the middle of February, a religious fair is held here. Now, as this is the greatest of the Shiva festivals, the fact of its being held at Elephanta indicates that it must once have been the principal, if not the oldest, temple of Shiva in the neighbourhood

The prayers of a devotee to this temple are not connected with his neglect of duty, his deficiencies in truth, honesty, or morality, or the expiation of the guilt of such offences, but are regarded as charms or spells, and his offerings as bribes that his god may prosper him in all his undertakings and satisfy his wishes without any regard to these being honourable, selfish, virtuous, criminal or vicious. The Hindus do not all worship the same gods. Their Aryan ancestors worshipped the powers of Nature personified, such as Indra, the god of thunder and rain; Varuna, the god of the sky; Agni, the god of fire; Mitra, the sun; Ushas, the dawn; the Maruts, or winds; Rudra, the god of storms, &c., &c. As all the sculptures in this Great Cave relate to Shiva, in order to understand them we must attend to his history. He is called the "Wearer of the Eight Forms", as being identified with Earth

Water, Air, Fire, Ether, the Sun, the Moon, and the Sacrificer :—

- No. 1. This central figure represents Brahma, the Creator; that on the right is Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva, the destroyer on the left. This is the most striking of the sculptures. It is called Trimurti which means *Tri*, three, and *Murti*, figure or representation, *viz.*, the three-faced bust. Brahma holds a pomegranate in his left hand; Vishnu holds a lotus flower in his left hand; Shiva holds a cobra. The meaning of pomegranate is creation; that of the lotus, preservation and that of the cobra, destruction. The figures on each side are supposed to be door-keepers, each attended by a dwarf.
- No. 2. This represents Shiva in his double character as male and female personification of nature in the one form. This figure has four arms; namely, two of a male and two of a female. One of his arms rests on the sacred bull Nandi.

On the left hand side of the spectator is Brahma, sitting on his throne, carried

by five swans ; and in the recess is Indra, the god of the firmament, who is riding on the celestial elephant “ Airavati”. On the right hand side is Vishnu, sitting on Garuda, or Suparna, the king of the feathered tribes, half eagle and half man, and the small figures which you see above represent angels. At the bottom on the right hand side are two females, one with a mirror in her hand, and the other with a cow’s tail fan.

- No. 3. This represents Shiva with his wife, Parvati, after having been separated into two distinct sexes. On the top of Shiva’s head there is a three-faced figure, which represents the junction of three sacred rivers, *viz.*, the Ganges, the Jumna and the Saraswati. On the left hand side of the spectator is Brahma sitting on his throne carried by five swans, and to the left of Brahma is Indra, who is Lord of the Firmament, riding on his celestial elephant ; then on the right top side of Parvati is Vishnu, the Preserver, on Garuda’s shoulders. The figures on

each side represent angels, and at the bottom are two dwarfs and two female attendants ; the latter are on the left.

No. 4. The Linga Chapel. This shrine has a door on each side of it, four in all, and two door-keepers to each. In the centre of the room stands a base or altar, in the centre of which is placed the Linga. This plain stone, the mysterious symbol representative of Shiva as the male energy of production, or source of the generative power in Nature, by Europeans is called the "Wishing Stone," and is believed to have a marvellous power to believers. There are two holes in the upper and lower part of each door, sockets for door-posts to fit in. When this temple was in use, DeCouto tells us that the four gates of this shrine were never opened, except once a year, on the day of the greatest festivity. At the Shivaratri festival the Linga is still specially worshipped, and is much resorted to by Hindu barren women of the Banian caste.

No. 5. Represents the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, in which she stands at his right

hand, a position which the wife only occupies on the day of her marriage. She slightly inclines her head, as if bashful, and is being pushed forward by Himalaya, her father. At Shiva's left, crouching on his hams, is Brahma, who is represented as acting the part of priest in the ceremony. Behind stands Vishnu. In his right hand he holds a lotus, and the back left hand a (? mirror) Chakra. On the extreme right hand stands Mena, the mother of the bride, and the female figure over the bride's head is, perhaps, Sarasvasti. On Parvati's right hand stands a female Chamara (? cow-tail fan) bearer, and behind her is Chandra, the Moon god, bearing a pot of water for the marriage ceremony. Above Shiva's head are a male between two females, and above them two smaller figures. On the other side are six more figures.

- No. 6. Facing the marriage is seen Shiva sacrificing a child. He has eight arms and eight hands. In his right hand he holds

a sword, and in his left a child. In one of the other hands he holds a bowl in which to catch the blood, and in one of his other hands he holds a bell, to announce the sacrifice. In one of Shiva's right hands he holds an elephant's hide for the purpose of hiding (?) the child after death. All round his neck is part of a garland of human skulls, showing the number of sacrifices he has made.

- No. 7. This represents the Tandava dance of Shiva when in a state of intoxication. Unfortunately, he is addicted to drinking bhang, a native drink made out of several ingredients, one of which is Masala (?) He has got eight arms, and with one of his right hands he is supposed to be playing a harp ; and the lower figure is a woman who is supposed to be holding a music book—it is now damaged—and on her left is a skeleton representing Death. On Shiva's right hand is Parvati, his wife, supposed to be dead but not yet disposed of, and above her head is Indra on the celestial elephant, and

on Indra's right hand is Vishnu on Garuda's shoulders. On Shiva's right hand is Brahma, sitting on his throne carried by five swans, and in the corner is Gunpatti, Shiva's son, with an elephant's head, god of wisdom ; and the red-faced figure represents an attendant with a spear in his hand.

- No. 8. This is Shiva as an ascetic, mourning the loss of his wife ; he is sitting on a spot of the Himalaya mountains, upheld by two figures. On the spectator's right hand is a sunflower. Then a plantain tree, and above it is Vishnu on Garuda's shoulders, and above that, again, is a small figure on horse-back, who is Shiva's second son. At the spectator's right hand top corner is Brahma sitting on his throne, carried by five swans. The top figures are angels.

- No. 9. This represents the Silver Mountain of Ceylon, upon which are seated Shiva and his wife Parvati (silver in this case means bright, and is not a metal). While they are sitting there the ten-faced

Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka or Ceylon, the son of Brahma, gets under the Silver Mountain that he might carry it to Lanka so as to have Shiva all to himself to make sure of his aid against Rama Dut. Parvati, perceiving the movement, called to Shiva—"Some one moves the hill, we shall be overthrown." On which Shiva, raising his foot, pressed down the mount on Ravana's head, and fixed him for ten thousand years. You will notice that Ravana, who has twenty arms, has his back turned towards you, and a sword is stuck in his waist-band, his faces are entirely obliterated, and only a few of his twenty arms are traceable. Above Shiva are numerous figures, one almost a skeleton, and on his left is Vishnu on Garudas, while in the recess is Parvati's tiger, crouched on his paws. Near Shiva's feet is Brinji, the skeleton, and on his left is Ganesha with his elephant head. All these figures are more or less destroyed.

- No. 10. This represents Shiva and Parvati seated together on a raised floor. Parvati is

seated at his left hand, and behind her right shoulder stands a nurse with Shiva's son astraddled on her left side, as children are usually carried in India. On Parvati's left stands a female figure, and farther off a larger male figure. Behind Shiva's right shoulder is another female with a chamara, and at his feet is his faithful attendant and worshipper, Brinji. Directly under Parvati is the bull, Nandi, and at her left shoulder a face with a wig such as is elsewhere given to Garuda.

- No. 11. On this circular platform was originally a stone bull called Nandi, which always faces the Linga shrine. This is called East-wing Tiger Caves. These two animals represent Leo-griff—half-lion and half-tiger—; they are not part of the solid rock, but were brought in. On the right of the entrance is the chapel room—Ganesha Chapel. Ganesha was Shiva's son, elephant-headed god of wisdom. He is sitting on the South side, and the nine figures represent nine virgins guard-

ing him. At the North end is Shiva ; on his right is Brahma, and on Brahma's right is a monkey god. On Shiva's left is Vishnu on Garuda's shoulders.

The centre room is a Linga shrine, and is used for the same purpose as the other. To the left, or East end, is a bath-room, in which there is nearly always six inches of water ; there has been none this year on account of our having had no rain last year. The water which finds entrance through the roof is supposed to be holy water which comes from the river Ganges by some mysterious power.

This is a door-keeper, with two attendant dwarfs.

No. 12. The West Wing. The centre room is a Linga shrine, with a door-keeper on each side of the doorway attended by dwarfs. At the North end is Shiva in the aseetic attitude, on a lotus throne, upheld by two fat figures with heavy wings. To the right of Shiva is a figure sitting on his heels, and above is Brahma with

three faces and some other forms. To the South of the Linga door Shiva is seen with six arms, and the third eye in his forehead. In the front right hand he holds a cobra, at his right is a plantain tree, and above is Brahma on his lotus seat borne by the swans. On Brahma's left is a male riding on a bull.

In 1870 a small seal for a ring was found at the excavations on the east side of the island. It is an oval light ruby coloured cornelian 0·435 inch long by 0·35 inch broad, the length of the face 0·40 and its breadth 0·28 inch, on this is sunk an ellipse 0·37 by 0·26 inch, inside which is sunk characters that stamp the word Nàràyana in letters of the 5th or 6th century A. C. It is now in possession of Dr. Bhàu Dàgé.
